

ARMED FORCES RACE CHALLENGE NEWS

The Holly Birkett 6 Hour Endurance Race is the Blue Ribbon event of the 750 Motor Club. Held each October, 68 teams of up to six cars/drivers in each team, take to the Silverstone GP circuit to do battle for 6 hours of racing. The range of cars is enormous from Ford GT40s' to Smart cars. The RAFMSA has in previous years been very successful, with overall wins on handicap, as well as class wins. For 2015 and to compliment the Armed Forces Race Challenge a tri-service team was entered.

The six driver team (two from each service) was supported by

numerous other members of the RAFMSA, BAMA and the RNRMMSA.



WO Ed McKean 1st to test conditions

Saturday morning set up the weather for the rest of the day, foggy, wet and windy, although, practice did start with a reasonable dry, if slippery track. As the grid is pre decided there is no point going out on track to break the lap record. It is more of a track familiarization and the running order was set on race numbers. The 2015 AFRC team were WO Ed McKean (RAF), Sqn Ldr Darren Howe (RAF), SSgt Chris Wood (Army), Cpl Daz Smee (Army), LH Seb Unwin (Navy) and Lt Cdr Richard Scott (Navy).

All drivers reported the conditions as 'Interesting' especially when running on semi- slicks. Many drivers changed tyres for a 'Wet' race and with over 350 drivers to do the prerequisite 3 laps there was little time between the end of practice and race start.



Sqn Ldr Darren Howe's Golf

Ed McKean would take the start for team AFRC. As race time approached the weather deteriorated further and by the time of the green flag lap it was so wet that the organizers took the decision to have a rolling start rather than the customary stationary, lights out, GO start.

Being in the middle of the pack Ed managed to maintain position across the line, but the spray was terrible, and not only that, the inside of the BMW 325 was steaming up badly. After 3 laps Ed could not see a thing and decided it would be safer to come into the pits and hand over to Darren Howe. Darren is a seasoned competitor in the Birkett and his Volkswagen Golf perfectly suited to the conditions. Darren settled quickly into a good pace for the slightly drier conditions. After the first hour and the early change over, Team AFRC had climbed up the leader board, if only slightly, it looked as though this wasn't going to be a winning year, as the conditions meant that drivers couldn't get near the handicap lap times declared.



Seb Unwin in the Team Navy BMW 318

Next to take the rains was Seb Unwin in the Team Navy BMW 318, which he was sharing with Richard Scott. The conditions were by now getting better and Seb was able to press on and put in an impresses session lifting the team to 30th on handicap.



Team Army, SSgt Chris Wood (BMW) and Daz Smee (Honda)

SSgt Chris Wood in another BMW managed to get in a few good laps before it started to rain again and after his session the team were now 27th on handicap. Just as Daz Smee in his Honda Integra took to the track the heavens really opened, so much so that for safety reasons the organizers took the decision to deploy the safety car. The safety car was out for nearly half an hour so Daz only managed half of his stint racing and by the time Richard Scott had finished the final session Team AFRC were 49th on scratch and 31st on handicap.



Darren Howe, read if needed

Not the win the team wanted, but considering this is the first year Team AFRC have run in the Birkett and the fact the weather was the worst for many a year, not too bad a result and there is always next year.

Pictures by Nick and Mark Rogers

